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FROM THE AMBASSADOR FOR ADMIRAL MULLEN

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: ENCOURAGING U.S. SHIP VISITS TO RUSSIA

¶1. Resetting relations with Russia is a key foreign policy objective for the Obama administration. We need to reduce levels of tension and mistrust, and refocus the relationship on ways to integrate Russia into regional and global institutions as a responsible player that can dramatically affect a range of issues critical to US national security.

¶2. One potentially fruitful area of engagement is our military-to-military relationship. Interagency discussions are now considering how to move forward in light of the reduced contacts following the conflict in Georgia and Russian failure to follow through on many activities on the mil-mil work plan. I believe we should look carefully at the full range of military-to-military engagement, with the hope that these activities could revitalize the relationship and reap the benefits that they have provided over the years.

¶3. US Navy and Coast Guard port visits and joint exercises and operations in the Pacific have, for years, helped promote confidence-building, professionalization of the Russian military and public diplomacy. The Coast Guard has even conducted successful joint operations with the Russian border guards, resulting in the interdiction of vessels using illegal drift nets. The US and Russia are neighbors in the Pacific, and robust cooperation on the high seas is in our mutual interest. Joint training promotes counter-terrorism and counter-narcotics operations as well.

¶4. For several years, US ships, like the USS STETHEM last year, have taken part in Victory Day celebrations in Vladivostok on May 9. This has become a tradition that has both political and public diplomacy benefits, honoring our successful alliance to defeat Nazi Germany in World War Two in a way that still has profound popular resonance in Russia today. It is a natural segue to successful cooperation today in space, trade, and we hope a number of security areas as well, including Iran, North Korea, and Afghanistan.

¶5. For all of these reasons, I hope that we can agree to approve a visit of a US Naval ship to Vladivostok for this year's Victory Day celebration, as well as the previously-planned July 2009 port visit, assuming the Russians will agree. As always, the Embassy will support the visit, and the Consulate will arrange community relations events for the sailors with local orphanages, veterans' homes, and local officials. I know from previous ship visits I have hosted that the sailors on board are some of the finest Ambassadors who serve our country. I look forward to welcoming them back to

Vladivostok in May.  
BEYRLE